

Key Ideas from the Keys to Quality Accreditation Project



Key Idea: Curriculum by Peggy Wark, Keys to Quality Staff

What is curriculum? How do we, as early childhood educators, guarantee that curriculum is meaningful for children? At the same time, how do we keep up with increasing demands for accountability and intellectual integrity in our classrooms? These are not easy questions. We all struggle for answers while continuing to teach, guide, and support young children in our programs.

There are several sources of help for educators and administrators trying to develop an appropriate curriculum for young children. The revised addition of NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice lists curriculum guidelines. Also, there are now National Standards for Education as well as RI standards adapted from these standards. While these standards do not specifically apply to early childhood, they do make it very clear what is expected of children in specific grades throughout their educational career.

Our job is to build the foundation that will enable children to meet these standards later on in their education by helping ALL children develop the needed skills and dispositions. To do this, curriculum review is critical.

Keeping our children interested and engaged is a good thing but it is not enough. If we are choosing activities at random there is no guarantee we are giving children the tools they will need upon entering elementary school. We must have a carefully planned, written curriculum with outcomes and expectations for our children. This should include activities not only based on childrens' interests but also those that support the curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum must address ALL areas of

1. Locate anything you have in writing describing your curriculum. This should include your philosophy, mission, goals, and your program's guidelines for planning.
2. Choose the main areas you wish to include in your curriculum, making sure to address the whole child.
3. Now, begin to brainstorm what you do and under which of the main areas it fits.
4. Based on this brainstorming, rearrange and rewrite each area into observable expectations for children.

5. Review the NAEYC guidelines and the National Standards. Decide if you have any "holes" in your curriculum and decide how to fix them.
6. Now that you have the beginning of a purposeful curriculum, make a plan to carry out this curriculum. Include ways to assess learning to make sure your plan is working.

With each step, the process becomes more exciting as you watch your curriculum take form.

Remember that each step increases the quality of our teaching and our services to young children and their families.

For more information, contact the Keys to Quality Project by contacting RI Department of Education, Preschool Grant Coordinator, 401/222-4600 x 2408. E-mail: abcohen@lde.ri.net or CHILDSPAN at 401/729-0765, e-mail: RICCTS@intap.net.